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Carlos P. Romulo

Facing the new realities in Asia

FACING THE NEW REALITIES IN ASIA

by Carlos P. Romulo

THE FALL of Khmer and South Vietnam has brought about a serious study of our security requirements, especially in regard to the generation-old defense arrangements with the United States. In all the chancelleries of Asia, similar studies are going on, prodded by the thought that a new era is being born in our relations among ourselves and in our relations with the great Powers.

The shape of the new era defies exact definition at this stage. Until time allows the pieces to fall into place, the new configuration of forces in Asia will not emerge in full clarity.

But one thing is certain. We must move, though with prudence and caution, to assess our national interests anew and forge new policies in the light of those interests. In close consultation with our friend and ally, the United States, we will re-examine the common bases of our security arrangements and find out if today they suit the changing circumstances in Asia and serve our respective national interests.

In the generation since common defense arrangement between the Philippines and the United States, the structure of international relations has altered considerably. Our problems have changed, our requirements are different, because we are faced by new realities. It is these new realities which we must confront; they must form the basis of the re-assessment of Philippine-American security arrangements.

(Address by Foreign Secretary Carlos P. Romulo delivered at the Plaza luncheon given by the Information and Cultural Attaches Group of the Diplomatic Corps, Tuesday, May 27, 1975)

With singular prescience as befits a national leader, President Marcos long ago foresaw the possibility of changes in the relations among nations in Asia. Moving to adapt to these circumstances, he directed soon after his election as President in 1965 that fresh studies be made of the various pending issues in connection with the Bases Agreement. During his state visit to the United States in 1966 he agreed with President Johnson that the bases negotiations should be continued.

In 1970, President Marcos created a Philippine technical panel to meet with its American opposite number.

In 1971, he directed me to prepare a complete review of Philippine foreign policy, with particular attention to a re-assessment of our security arrangements with the United States.

Finally, on June 6, 1972, the President issued a directive for the study of the Philippine position on the bases question and called on the United States for renewed negotiations. For this purpose, he created a sub-committee on Military Agreements.

The problem therefore is a long-standing one. His call for new negotiations before the U.P. Law Alumni Association was not made on the spur of the moment. But the swift and dramatic fall of Khmer and South Vietnam left the President with no option but to go to the people and emphasize the paramount importance of assuring the security of the nation.

We like to believe that the American people, noted for their sense of fairness, and cognizant of the fast-paced developments in our area, welcomed the statesmanlike stand of President Marcos as voiced by the *Washington Post*, in a recent editorial, which I quote:

> "Mr. Marcos has drawn exactly the right 'lesson' from Vietnam. Far from chiding him for pointing out that the American weight in the new Asian power balance is shifting. Americans ought to commend him for his plain speaking and clear vision and join forthrightly with him in the policy review he seeks. Considerations of national security along with the instinct of a savvy politician impel

him to reposition himself within the volatile Philippine political spectrum–an oligarchy at one end, an insurgency at the other. Mr. Marcos rules by military law, but he is not so insensitive or invulnerable to political sentiments that he would, even if he could, ignore the powerful nationalistic forces at work in a country which has still to shake off the last traces of its American imperial heritage.

"These negotiations will be of paramount significance to the Philippines. While the United States will be deciding whether or on what terms to maintain a particular military position 10,000 miles from home, the Philippines will be redesigning the very foundation of its national life. This makes it all the more important for the United States to take a patient and sympathetic attitude toward its former dependency. We owe Manila the opportunity to make its own best choice for its future. As for the United States, the negotiations will demonstrate to ourselves as well as others that we are capable of making reasoned judgments about our place in the world. The American objective should not be to hold, in a diminished and discreet form, the old imperial ramparts. It should be to cope with local Asian nationalism in a respectful spirit not dominated by the 'strategic' considerations of the past. The principal test of American policy in the new, post-Vietnam Asia, after all, will not be simply whether we can live up to the letter of each and every past commitment but whether we can adjust to change."

Also strongly endorsing the Marcos' foreign policy speech before the U.P. Law Alumni Association, the *Indianapolis Star*, editorially says:

> "U.S. commentators with superficial knowledge of international affairs might believe that this new Marcos policy is 'bad' for the United States.
>
> "We submit that, to the contrary, the new Marcos policy is good for the United States, just as it is good for the Philippines.
>
> "What we need in Asia, as well as everywhere else in the world, are self-reliant friends, who do not depend on us for their survival.
>
> "Foreign governments whose representatives come to Washington cap in hand are no good as allies. Satellites can never become good friends, and good friends can never be satellites."

The Defense arrangements with the United States are clearly no longer tenable. The key clause of the Mutual Defense Treaty is the famous Article IV under which an armed attack against the Philippines or the United States will be met in accordance with their respective "constitutional processes."

Now, there are two interpretations of this Article. The first is that it constitutes a guarantee of instant retaliatory action by the United States in the event of an armed attack on the Philippines. Such assurances were given by President Eisenhower in 1958 and later by President Johnson.

The second interpretation, which emerged during the Symington sub-committee hearings in the U.S. Senate at a time when the United States had begun to be disillusioned by its intervention in Vietnam, vividly illustrates the inherent ambiguities of the Mutual Defense Treaty. Three conclusions can be drawn from the Symington hearings—first, the United States will instantly repel an attack on the United States forces in the Philippines; second, the United States is *not* obligated under the terms of the Treaty to respond in the same fashion if we are attacked in a way which does not endanger the U.S. forces in the country; third, American Presidents can not diminish or exceed the contents of the Treaty, which in effect means that guarantees of instant retaliation issued by Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson have in fact no value and cannot bind the United States Congress which alone has the power to declare war.

In short, we are inescapably led to the conclusion that the Mutual Defense Treaty is far from being mutual and that it exists solely for the protection of the U.S. forces stationed in the Philippines.

The irony of the situation can not escape anyone. We who signed the Treaty in the full belief that it ensures the Philippines from external aggression now find that it is us, the small Power, who consider ourselves obligated to defend the big Power.

We do not question the sincerity of Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson or of the United States Senate when it ratified the Treaty. In the context of the Cold War, they may have had the full intention of interpreting the Mutual Defense Treaty in a way which ensures the safety of the Philippines in the event of external aggression.

Such an interpretation follows from the general nature of their foreign policies and the character of their voluntary role in Asia.

Circumstances change, however, and along with these the nature of those policies. The Nixon Doctrine is a clear portent of the reassessment of American interests in Asia. What it seems to mean is that while the United States will continue to have important interests in Asia, such interests are no longer considered vital or as primary to its national interest.

It seems to us that Vietnam and Cambodia illustrate the first historic case interpretation of the Nixon Doctrine. It is true that the United States has no mutual defense treaty with either country, and is therefore under no obligation to defend either. This is of course rationalization for, treaty or no treaty, the fact was that the United States spent 160 billion dollars and gave up the lives of many thousands of its sons, not to speak of the million Vietnamese and Cambodian lives sacrificed in the war. To our mind, this constitutes a commitment far stronger than the letter of any treaty.

We are faced therefore with a new reality in Asia. We must make an accommodation, not with past, but with present realities. In making a new assessment of our defense arrangements with the United States, it is this thought that guides President Marcos.

How then should we regard the American bases in the Philippines?

Are they good for us? Do they help assure our physical security?

Or are they of no value to us? Are they, in the present context of Asia, a factor for instability which, instead of adding to our security, diminishes it?

As much as the United States, the Philippines is in mood of intense self-scrutiny. History has turned a corner. We cannot afford to ignore this development without risking our very survival. In this most important hour, President Marcos has turned to the people. If

he had not done so, he would have been remiss in his most important duty under the Constitution. As President, it has been his objective to develop a strong, self-reliant country based on accelerated economic and social progress, on cooperation with all countries without regard to ideology, and on assurance of its physical safety. In the hierarchy of our national interests, this triad takes the foremost place, for our survival as a nation depends on our success in achieving these objectives.

President Marcos' call for a re-assessment of the security arrangements should be viewed in this light. No nation can change its security posture, as the United States appears to have done, without causing a re-arrangement in the security postures of its allies. The United States understands this. In the same way that it must act in accordance with its national interests, its allies must do so if they are to preserve their physical integrity and enhance their progress.

The re-assessment of Philippine foreign policy therefore as announced by our President should not be viewed as an act of hostility to a nation with which we have had the closest ties for more than seven decades. Nor are we spurning a friend in its hour of national trauma. It is stating the obvious to reiterate that we have only the most cordial feeling for the American people for whose ideals we fought in Bataan and Corregidor.

But we must find a new basis, in the light of our national interest, for continued friendly relationship.

In the long run, this should redound to our common benefit. Sovereign independence and respect for each other's interests are the firmest foundation, for friendly cooperation.

The defeat of Khmer and South Vietnam has caused a certain instability in Asia, for which solutions will have to be found. To this difficult process we are prepared to contribute. As far as domestic policies are concerned, however, the

President has issued assurances that there shall be no change. It would be a gross error to entertain fears of xenophobic reactions against the United States or any other country which are cooperating with us in the task of national development. We shall continue to give these partners in development the same incentives, the same mutually beneficial safeguards, and the same cooperation in helping them to contribute to the national progress.

As I said earlier, President Marcos views economic development, as indeed he must, as one of the highest of our highest national objectives. Insofar as economic and social development adds to the strength of the country, it occupies a very important place in the broad spectrum of interests which build up a nation's security.

Our philosophy of development is based on private initiative with guidance from the government in the form of planning for diversified and maximum growth. This philosophy and the policies which follow from it will be continued without change. To these policies we owe not only the phenomenal growth of the country in the last three years but also the solid domestic stability which is a consequence of economic and social development. On sheer pragmatic grounds, if on no other, the continuation of the policies of President Marcos in regard to investments and business, whether foreign or domestic, is a necessity.

The President's re-assessment of our security posture is made under the strongest compulsion. He must look ahead and think in the long term, as all Filipinos must. Let me assure, however, that no immediate threat confronts the Philippines. Our strongest bastions are the oceans which surround us. We shall undertake our re-assessment in the friendliest spirit and in full appreciation of each other's interests in this hour of trial. However the re-assessment may turn out—and we shall do so in close mutual consultations—the Philippines and the United States will remain friends, always mindful of the ties

of tradition and history. Of this there can be no doubt; we shall continue to share many important interests and shall continue to cooperate for the common benefit. □

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